

## **Principles for the Evaluation of Objectives, Materials, and Classroom Activities**

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The purpose of this brief paper is to submit a number of germane questions which may function as guiding principles in the process of designing and implementing a foreign language syllabus. It begins with a consideration of learner needs. That is, the various situations, topics, activities, functions, notions, and language forms which the learners will likely encounter. Consequently, objectives which are realistic and relevant can then be specified. Next, the evaluation of materials is considered. Finally, questions which deal with the evaluation of classroom activities are presented.

In this brief paper I should like to direct my comments and observations to teachers of English as a foreign language who bear the responsibility of designing and implementing courses for university students. The principles presented here specifically address the skills of speaking and listening, though, in a number of instances, they are equally applicable to the skills of reading and writing as well. Above all else, I wish this paper to be practical. It is certainly disconcerting to be bombarded with methods and materials which make extravagant and unrealistic claims. Native-like fluency in six easy lessons?

Furthermore, the ideas presented here are those culled

from personal, and sometimes painful, experience. Recording my impressions in a journal after each class over the past year has resulted in a data-bank from which I have drawn the following ideas. It is hoped that the following questions will assist the course designer and language teacher in evaluating the various aspects of design and implementation.

### Communicative Language Teaching

Since the early 1970s the term 'communicative' has become quite fashionable. At worst, in reaction to extreme forms of audiolingualism, it has been adopted without any critical understanding of its principles and has become synonymous with "progressive teaching". At best, it has provided a much needed balance between the extreme emphasis on linguistic competence on the one hand, and an "anything-goes-as-long-as-you-get-your-meaning-across" approach (Savignon, 1983:1) on the other. That is, a communicative approach encourages us to go beyond structures and to consider other aspects of communication which will more effectively prepare the learner to take part in the activity of communication.

A communicative approach, therefore, provides a more balanced perspective on language. In particular, it makes us consider language not merely as a set of structures, but as communication, a view in which meaning and the functions to which language is put play an essential part. Furthermore, a communicative approach opens up a broader perspective on language learning. We are reminded that the ability to manipulate the structures of the language is not our

terminal objective. Rather, it is the ability to use the language in appropriate ways for communicative purposes in real situations.

With this in mind, let us consider the task of formulating objectives.

## 1. Formulating Objectives

(1.1 - 1.8 are treated fully in Van Ek and Alexander, 1975)

- 1.1 What are the situations in which the learners are likely to use the language?
- 1.2 What are the likely topics which will be dealt with in such situations?
- 1.3 What language activities will the learners be likely to engage in? For example, asking questions at a shop.
- 1.4 What language functions will the learners be likely to use? For example, expressing and finding out intellectual attitudes.
- 1.5 What general notions will the learners be likely to use? For example, existence/non-existence.
- 1.6 What topics and topic-related notions will the learners be likely to engage in?
- 1.7 What language forms associated with the functions and notions specified above will the learners be likely to use? For example, function: expressing agreement  
language forms: I agree.  
That's right.  
Of course.  
Certainly.
- 1.8 What realistic degree of proficiency will be required of the learners?
- 1.9 In what ways will the learners' level of proficiency be evaluated?
- 1.10 In what sequence should the language be presented to the learners? According to what criteria?

## 2. Evaluation of Materials

- 2.1 What are the underlying presuppositions of the materials regarding language and language acquisition?
- 2.2 Are they in accordance with or in opposition to the view of language and language acquisition held by the teacher?
- 2.3 What elements of the language are included and according to what organizational system are they presented? As a structural-grammatical syllabus? As a notional syllabus? As a functional syllabus? As a situational syllabus?
- 2.4 How are the contents sequenced throughout the materials as well as within each unit? According to grammatical forms? Notions? Functions? Situations?
- 2.5 Are the contents presented in a linear fashion (A - B - C) or cyclically (A1 - B1 - C1 - A2 ...) where previously covered material is later further developed?
- 2.6 What kind of cohesiveness and continuity do the materials possess?
- 2.7 How rigid or flexible are the exercises?
- 2.8 Should the materials be covered in a progressive manner or can the order be altered?
- 2.9 Do the exercises presume one correct answer or are there a variety of possible responses?
- 2.10 To what extent can the materials be exploited in a number of ways?
- 2.11 What assumptions about the learners, teacher, and classroom situation are supposed?
- 2.12 What roles do the materials require or encourage the learners and teacher to assume?
- 2.13 What teaching methodology do the materials require or encourage?
- 2.14 To what extent do the exercises progress from controlled to less controlled?
- 2.15 To what extent do the materials employ the stages of presentation, practice, and production?
- 2.16 To what extent do the materials exploit an information gap between interlocutors and so replicate real communicative situations?
- 2.17 To what extent do the materials provide the learners with a choice, both in terms of what ideas they wish to express as well as how (i.e. linguistic forms) they

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wish to express it?

- 2.18 To what extent do the materials allow for structural and communicative feedback to the learner?
- 2.19 To what extent do the materials allow for immediate manipulation of the information received?
- 2.20 To what extent do the materials employ language as a means of performing a task rather than focusing entirely on the language itself?
- 2.21 To what extent do the materials provide training in the sub-skills of a communicative act?
- 2.22 To what extent do the materials provide training in whole communicative acts?
- 2.23 To what extent will the learners find the materials to be interesting? Relevant?
- 2.24 To what extent do the materials involve the learners' attitudes, values, and emotions?
- 2.25 To what extent are the materials appropriate with regard to the objectives of the course?
- 2.26 To what extent can the materials serve in assessing the learners' competence?
- 2.27 To what extent are the materials teaching as opposed to testing?
- 2.28 By whom and for whom were the materials developed? For a specific group of learners or the international market?

### 3. Evaluation of Classroom Activities

- 3.1 What are the specific objectives of the lesson?
- 3.2 To what extent do the exercises and activities contribute to or divert from the objectives of the course?
- 3.3 Have the objectives of the lesson been made clear to the learners, thereby giving them a sense of purpose before and a sense of achievement after a class?
- 3.4 Are the activities and objectives appropriate with regard to the length of the class, class size, and so on?
- 3.5 What method is most appropriate with regard to each objective?
- 3.6 To what extent do the activities reflect a purpose (e.g. asking for information) which prompts their use in the real world?

- 3.7 To what extent do the activities develop skills which are transferable to the real world?
- 3.8 To what extent are the activities related to previous and future class work?
- 3.9 What is the most appropriate sequence of activities?
- 3.10 What operation(s) will the learner be able to perform at the end of the lesson which he was unable to at the start?
- 3.11 To what extent are the activities developing skills which are communicatively useful?
- 3.12 To what extent are the activities employing authentic language?
- 3.13 To what extent do the activities replicate authentic communication?
- 3.14 To what extent do the activities involve some communicative purpose?
- 3.15 To what extent are there a variety of activities to maintain the learners' interest?

### Final Considerations

Unquestionably, designing and implementing a course which is relevant, informative, and interesting is a formidable task. There are a great number of variables which bear on the exigencies of the teaching situation, and plans, ideal as they may be, must accord with realistic limitations. The time available for the acquisition of the language is, obviously, a key factor. Moreover, the distribution of time is another factor which must be taken into consideration. That is, are classes held five times a week? Once a week? Reasons for studying the language, opportunities to use the language with native speakers, opportunities to use the language in the immediate future, and other important variables must all be carefully weighed as one engages in the process of designing a course. Failure to do

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so will invalidate even excellent ideas and result in a sense of frustration for learners and teacher alike.

In conclusion then, it is hoped that the questions set forth in this paper will be of practical value to those who are involved in the task of designing courses for non-native speakers of English. In light of factors such as instruction time, distribution of instruction time, student motivation, and so on which compound the teaching situation, it is imperative that courses be relevant, interesting, and well-planned. The teacher, having taken the various factors into consideration, must set realistic goals. He must establish specific objectives and select appropriate materials which will enable the goals to be realized. And he must make it very clear to the learners what those goals and objectives are and exactly what is expected of them. Finally, he must attend to the daily challenges of making the journey purposeful, relevant, and rewarding.

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語学教育における到達目標水準，教材および授業活動の評価の原則

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